

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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R 081056Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9119
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 4539

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT LE
SUBJ: COLONEL AHMAD AL HAJJ

1. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL BEIRUT NEWSPAPERS, COLONEL AHMAD AL HAJJ, COMMANDER OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF), SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION TO INTERIOR MINISTER SALAH SALMAN LAST WEEK. SALMAN, HOWEVER, REFUSED TO ACCEPT IT AND GAVE AL HAJJ A TWO WEEKS VACATION INSTEAD, THE PRESS REPORTED.

2. IN A FRONT-PAGE STORY ON AUGUST 5 REFERRING TO THE RESIGNATION, AS-SAFIR CONTRASTED THE "PROTECTIVE ATTITUDE" OF DEFENSE MINISTER BOUTROS TOWARDS SA'AD HADDAD AND MAJOR SHIDIAC WITH THE STATE'S "NEGLIGENCE" OF A SUNNI OFFICER LIKE AL HAJJ. ACCORDING TO AS-SAFIR, SOME MEMBERS OF THE ISF STAGED A "SYMBOLIC STRIKE" OF ABOUT 25 MINUTES TO DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR AL HAJJ ON AUGUST 3.

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3. THE PHALANGE RADIO HAD PREVIOUSLY REPORTED AL HAJJ HAD RESIGNED IN DISSATISFACTION OVER RECENT ARMY PROMOTIONS, WHEREBY BOTH HE AND CHIEF OF STAFF MUNIR TORBAY WERE MADE BRIGADIER GENERALS (SEE AUG. 3 SITREP). ACCORDING TO THE RADIO, AL HAJJ BELIEVED THIS WAS AN INSULT, BECAUSE HE HAS THREE YEARS' SENIORITY ON TORBAY. AS-SAFIR, HOWEVER, ON AUGUST 1 DENIED THE PHALANGE RADIO REPORT AND STATED

VAGUELY THAT THE RESIGNATION WAS FOR "MUCH BIGGER REASONS."

4. AS-SAFIR ON AUGUST 3 REMARKED THAT AL HAJJ IS A MODERATE MUSLIM, LIKE ADF COMMANDER SAMI KHATIB AND PRIME MINISTER HOSS. "PEOPLE IN WEST BEIRUT NOW WONDER IF THE STATE IS IMPATIENT WITH HOSS, AL HAJJ AND KHATIB . . . WHICH MUSLIM IS ACCEPTABLE?" AS-SAFIR URGED SARKIS TO MAKE A THOROUGH REVIEW OF THE SITUATION.

5. AL HAJJ IS ONE OF THE PROMINENT MUSLIM ARMY OFFICERS WHO REFUSED TO JOIN SIDES IN THE 1975-76 CIVIL WAR. HE WAS AMONG THE FIRST OFFICERS TO BE PICKED BY PRESIDENT SARKIS AFTER HIS ELECTION IN 1976 TO SERVE IN HIS ADMINISTRATION. SARKIS FIRST MADE AL HAJJ COMMANDER OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES (ADF), AND LATER TRANSFERRED HIM TO THE POST OF ISF COMMANDER.

6. COMMENT: WE SUSPECT THAT AL HAJJ'S THREAT TO RESIGN IS, AS PHALANGE RADIO STATES, LARGELY OUT OF PERSONAL PIQUE. AS-SAFIR'S ATTEMPT TO MAKE THIS INTO A MAJOR ISSUE (AN ATTEMPT WHICH HAS FAILED) IS NEVERTHELESS SYMPTOMATIC OF THE INCREASING DISSATISFACTION ON THE PART OF LEBANESE MUSLIMS - BOTH ON THE LEFT AND RIGHT - WITH THE SARKIS REGIME. END COMMENT.
PARKER

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